

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH COLONEL STEPHEN SCOTT, U.S. ARMY, SECURITY ASSISTANCE OFFICE, MULTINATIONAL SECURITY TRANSITION COMMAND IRAQ, VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM IRAQ MODERATOR: CHARLES "JACK" HOLT, CHIEF, NEW MEDIA OPERATIONS, OASD PA DATE: FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2008

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COL. SCOTT: (In progress) -- assistance officer here in MNSTC-I, and I've been here for approximately two months and 30 days -- I'm sorry -- two months and 15 days. My last assignment was actually at Office, Secretary of Defense, where I was in the Joint Rapid Acquisition Cell.

And I am pleased to report that we're making much, much progress on introducing foreign military sales into the minister of Defense.

Principal initiatives. We're standing up units against a timeline that project through the -- very, very heavily in the summer and then late into the fall, to stand up an Iraqi force capable of sustaining themselves. Right now we have nine force generation letters of request that have been signed by the minister of Defense that are our priorities for fielding units. The first one we expect to fully field, train, equip on the 13th of March, and that's designated the four of the 5th Infantry Brigade. And we are on time and on schedule.

Some of the commodities that we are in pursuit of through foreign military sales are here five-ton -- your five-ton cargo trucks, support equipment, uniforms, M-16s, other foreign weapons that are manufactured by other governments that we have agreements with.

Also we are involved in the training. I've said we -- at Besmaya we have the four of the 5th, where they actually have a basic training company, where they trained all the units, just like we do in the United States for basic training of U.S. soldiers. And then of course they go out to their assigned locations beyond Besmaya.

We actually had three senators in this week on a windshield tour of Besmaya, looking at the equipment and the fielding sets. We observed Iraqi soldiers actually at the rifle range, shooting M-16s. And it is -- one of our goals is to replace all of the AK-47s in the theater with M-16s. That's one of our foreign military sales programs.

Also, equipping them with humvees. The humvees that have actually been here under U.S. use for the last four years or so -- we have transitioned those to the Iraqis under foreign military sales cases. That program is going good.

Now we've also procured (IT&T ?) radios, to actually put these radios in these vehicles, and also to equip their T-72 tanks, their F-350 trucks that we've procured under foreign military sales. And we have quite a -- really, really established kind of a great relationship with not only the minister of Defense, but also many of the Iraqi generals and their leadership, and they're really getting on board with us.

So really, I wanted to set the stage and have this discussion forum to discuss any of your questions, your inquiries as to how we actually manage a program of this magnitude, why it's so important for me to have been here. Again, I've said -- I spent two and a half years up in D.C. working at Office of the Secretary of Defense, and when I was approached on coming over here to work foreign military sales, I jumped at the chance because I knew how important it was to both of our governments.

What amazes me as I get out and about and deal with the Iraqis and the soldiers -- how friendly they are with us, and they actually refer us -- to us as their brothers. Quite a relationship has really been built in really quite short order. Since I've been here, I've managed to actually make friends with the Iraqis, and they're so anxious to embrace not only our know-how and the way we've established our procedures and doctrine and training and leadership capabilities, but also just the way we engage with each other.

It's been a remarkable experience for me in the two and a half months that I have been here. I expect to follow this through and be here for the balance of the year. And I'm real excited about what the future brings for Iraq and their capability to stand themselves up as an Iraqi army. All conditions are looking good that we accomplish this late into the fall.

So with that, I'll -- I think I've made introductions and I would entertain any questions that you might have.

MR. HOLT: Thank you very much, sir.

And Christian.

Q Yes. Thanks, Colonel Scott. This is Christian Lowe with military.com, and I guess I'm one of the few people that has called in on this. And don't worry, I will use up a good amount of time with questions, because this is a very interesting program.

I just returned from Iraq and first of all, I'd like a quick housekeeping question. Where are you based? Where are you calling from?

COL. SCOTT: We are calling from the Multinational Stabilization and Transition Command headquarters. It's a three-star command, and we are physically located inside the International Zone. I call that the bubble. Q Okay.

COL. SCOTT: So we are actually in the International Zone, hence, used to be the -- what they called the Green Zone.

Q Okay. Thank you. I didn't know if you were based up north or anything like that. I just wanted to --

COL. SCOTT: Actually in Baghdad.

Q Okay. Roger. I have a question about the procurement of and fielding of the M-16s. I have a macro-question and a micro- question.

COL. SCOTT: Okay.

Q The micro-question first is, how many M-16s and of what model are you planning to buy or help the Iraqis buy and field? By that I mean M-4s versus M-16s, A-1s, A-2s, you know, et cetera. Just for that micro-question first, what is the load out that you guys are planning on helping them get?

COL. SCOTT: As it stands right now, we've got 50,000 M-16s on order. On blanket cases, we are buying M-16 A-2s and we're also buying the M-4s. Now the way the Iraqis use those weapons, the officers get the M-4s and the soldiers -- the NCOs and the soldiers themselves actually get the M-16s.

I was out at old Al Muthanna just this week, talking to the soldiers. And of course, you know, most of them use the old AK-47s that are many, many years old, of Soviet origin.

And just by virtue of the fact that we actually had an M-4, the Iraqis first and foremost hadn't even seen these things for the most part -- the sharp, sporty M-4 with the infrared scopes. You know, they've pretty much been limited to these old Russian or Soviet AK-47s.

So our program and our initiatives are really to replace every AK with an M-16. So I say we have 50,000 on order at this moment, but we will expand upon that. We have open cases through the Defense Security Cooperation Agency and the Defense Security Command down at Fort Belvoir. They're the ones who are contracting in the rear.

Q Okay.

Now for the macro question, and it's a simple one, why? Iraqis have grown up with AK-47s. It's one of the most ubiquitous weapons in the world. Ammunition is never hard to find. Why supply this military in this region with M-16 rifles?

COL. SCOTT: Well, we of course in the U.S. know that the M-16 is superior to the AK, contrary to some of the reports that I've most recently seen on M-4s. My first weapon when I was PFC Scott was an M- 16. So it's more durable.

I am also a fan of AKs. But keep in mind, most of these AKs, that have been sitting around in bunkers or whatnot for 30 or 40 years, are in various stages of disrepair. The M-16 is by far a superior weapon, and the Iraqis of course have embraced that. And mostly and partly, on their part, they believe it to be a superior weapon, and the fact that it is U.S.-manufactured-and-supplied. They are very big on U.S.-produced stuff, FMS materials.

Q Okay.

And that's an interesting point to get at. Is it -- how much of it would you gauge is perception rather than function? I mean, the fact that this military is walking around with U.S.-manufactured weapons, the best military in the, you know, the weapon the best military in the world carries -- how much do you think that perception helps them in their development of esprit and professionalism and that sort of thing?

COL. SCOTT: Well, you have to understand that, you know, United States military, and I've been in for 30 years, we have a rank and file. And we have what we consider a standard. The Iraqis themselves, you know, the AKs have been handed down. They never have had an opportunity to have the really, really good stuff.

You know, so a lot of that of course is perception-based. My personal opinion, for what it's worth, I own both weapons. Of course, my M-16 of course is semi-automatic. A private citizen is not authorized to own M-16-A2s. However I definitely prefer the caliber of the M-16 for the mission that we expect to use it at.

Back to the macro question, we have 43,000 M-16s actually on hand at the present.

Q Okay.

But that's -- and then you have an additional 50,000 on order.

COL. SCOTT: That is correct.

Q Okay.

And then what is your estimate for the numbers you'll need to replace every AK? Are we talking a half million or something?

COL. SCOTT: We have -- our goal is to give every Iraqi soldier an M-16-A2 or an M-4. Remember, I said that we give the officers the M-4s, and the M-16s to NCOs and the soldiers. Our goal is to equip every one of the Iraqi soldiers, and that would be approximately 165,000 at this point.

As the Iraqi army grows, of course, we will adjust. But also some of the other ideas: You're asking me the perceptions issue. You know, to provide discipline and training certainly, and certainly modernization, would be a big plus for using an M-16 versus an old AK- 47. And the accuracy of the M-16 is superior to the AK, just because of the ballistics of that round.

Q Okay and I'm sorry, last question on this.

Jack, is that okay?

MR. HOLT: Sure. Yeah, go ahead.

Q Okay.

I actually ended up chatting with a civilian contractor who was a trainer for the Iraqi army transitioning over to the M-16. He was doing it -- I forget where the base is, but he said it was Eastern Iraq, kind of near Al Kut, but I don't remember the name of the base. He gave me some interesting sort of feedback on how the Iraqi army has done in transitioning to the M-16, but I'd like to get your perspective on that. How well have they done transitioning to a weapon that really demands good marksmanship, and it demands very disciplined cleaning and care? How well have they done transitioning to that, in your view?

COL. SCOTT: Well, in my view, and I would have to say in my studied opinion, as I said, just last week, I was at Besmaya, where we have our basic training company, if you will. I went out to the rifle range, and their rifle range was about a 25-point firing range. And I actually asked a couple of the Iraqi soldiers, when they completed their round of firing, how they liked the weapon. And of course, through the translator, they told me that the weapon was far superior; it was more accurate.

He said he believed it to be more reliable. They haven't had it long enough to know that. I've found in my use over the years that I've never really had a misfire with an M-16. But I think the transition is almost transparent from those older AKs to the M-16s.

They like the way they feel. They're lighter and they're certainly more accurate.

So again, observing them with my own eyes and talking with them at the firing range, I think it's almost -- I think it's almost transparent and a normal training management we can not only control, but it's also significant modernization program.

Q Interesting. Okay, thank you.

COL. SCOTT: The Iraqis are very hands-on kind of folks. You know, they want to get their hands on this stuff. They've never had this opportunity before to have the really good stuff.

MR. HOLT: Okay, I'll take just a second here -- somebody else joined us? I know there was a couple other folks who had expressed interest. I don't think they've made the call yet.

Okay, so Christian, go ahead.

Q Yeah, I have another one here for you, Colonel Scott. What -- to what extent do you have a hand in supplying or helping the Iraqi army purchase aircraft?

COL. SCOTT: Well, in the SAO, the security assistance officer, we have -- we have, actually, four teams. I lead the Army programs. We also have an Air Force team. I know what goes on in those lanes. I don't manage those courses, but I know -- those cases, however, we have a very ambitious caravan program. The M-17s, of course, which are a foreign helicopter, we are -- part of the modernization program, we're looking to get them more C-130 Echo models. They currently have a fleet of three. So I know what goes on in those lanes. I do not manage the Air Force programs, the Air Force does.

Q Can you just fill me in on what is going on with those programs? And I don't know what you mean by caravan and the other helicopter that you mentioned.

COL. SCOTT: Okay. Well, you did know -- you know what a C-130 Hercules is, right?

Q Absolutely, yeah, flown around on those a bunch.

COL. SCOTT: Yeah, you and me both. Well, we currently have three of those. Under our force modernization initiatives they want to buy a fleet of,

I believe, of 40 of these to stand up the Iraqi air force. Of course, we have U.S. Air Force pilots here that are teaching their pilots how to fly those things, and they're actually doing quite well. I've actually ridden on an Iraqi C-130.

Q You're a gutsy guy.

COL. SCOTT: You got it. (Laughs.)

As far as the helos go, what we look as force modernization, would be the Huey 2, which is a UH-1. Of course, we still fly those in the U.S. army, the H models. The Huey 2 is nothing more than a Huey as we know it retrofitted with a Cobra engine, which gives it much more power. So we are in the process of equipping them with that helo platform and training their pilots on the M-17.

Now the M-17 is a Ukrainian-purchased helicopter. It is heavy lift, not quite as heavy as our CH-47. Currently, they only have a fleet of, I believe, six of those.

Of course we want them to go to the Huey 2's. The caravan is a small or -- is a small or medium fixed-wing aircraft, and we've most recently procured a King Air, which is the equivalent of our C-12. That seats eight passengers.

Q And what is your -- just from your knowledge, what is the outlook on how many of these either Huey 2s or -- is it an MI-17, MI --

COL. SCOTT: Yes, the Mi-17.

Q What is their plan on numbers -- (off mike) -- class of aircraft?

DAVID RAM (sp) (Public Affairs): We can get that information. Yeah, this is David Ram (sp), the Public Affairs officer with -- here over at MNSTC-I. We can get you that information, Christian, from our folks over on the Air Force --

Q Okay. I just thought if you knew --

COL. SCOTT: Yeah, I just do not know what that fleet is going to consist of. I mean, we're in the initial stages of --

MR. : (Off mike.)

COL. SCOTT: -- yeah -- of developing the Iraqi air force.

Q That's fine.

COL. SCOTT: But I can tell you, the M-17s and the C-130s and -- they are flying.

MR. : We've had a one thousand percent increase in just one year's time frame -- actually less than a year's time frame in the number of operational sorties that the Iraqi air force has actually executed. I believe all total there are 24 rotary-wing aircraft that have been procured through either foreign military sales or donations from coalition countries, but we'll get you the breakout.

The set in the caravan, the set in the 208 caravan is used for intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance of key infrastructure as well as key events. They've actually flown some missions with the -- those caravans in an overwatch for some of the pilgrimages to make sure that -- to ensure the public safety, so that there were no attacks on the civilian populace during those pilgrimages. The beach craft, King Air 350 Bravo, that has been procured through the Foreign Military Sales Office -- the first one was delivered in December, and they're expecting a total of six in that fleet. And by October of '08 the final deliveries will be made on all of those birds.

Those are a twin-engine, turbo-prop aircraft with some extensive legs. The first one is going to be used as a trainer aircraft as well as an executive transport and light cargo transport aircraft. The other five will -- their primary duties will be also with ISR. This is a crawl, walk, run even with the air force to eventually build them back up to a jet capability, a jet aircraft capability, but you just can't do that overnight. So we've got to get the pilots trained, get them equipped, and then (impermanently?) train them on more sophisticated aircraft.

And part of that training and part of that development is, you know, training those mechanics in order to sustain the air force.

So we're making forward progress on that, but we can get you some numbers. I'll send them to you. If you could get us your e-mail address, I can get those to you.

Q Okay. Yeah, I think I'd --

Q Right.

Q -- yeah, I think -- I'll get back to you because Dave, I'd also like to see if you have any art of the Iraqis training with the M-16. I have not seen any come across the wires, and I'd be interested to use some of that for a story.

COL. SCOTT: Jeff, you get me your e-mail address and I'll put you on our press-release distribution and make sure that you get that -- the publication of all of our foreign military sales stuff, as well training that we do with the Iraqi military.

Q Excellent. Okay, thanks.

MR. HOLT: Jeff, you can forward that through -- forward your -- I will forward your e-mail on to them through Kevin, there.

Q Please do. Thanks, Jack.

MR. HOLT: Billy?

Q That's it for me.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Did anyone else join us?

Q Jarred Fishman's on.

MR. HOLT: Yeah, Jarred. Okay. Yeah, go ahead.

Q Okay, great. Thank you, Colonel Scott.

If you could talk a little bit on the strategic level, does -- is there any greater level of transparency involved in order to -- obviously, back here in the States, the big problem is people say, well, there's so much corruption. We give the weapons and then we never know what happens to them, and we get ripped off. So could you talk a little bit about the structure of the FMS? Does that help the American taxpayer feel a little bit better about the investments that we're making?

COL. SCOTT: Okay. Well, I can talk about that. And, of course, I am a taxpayer. I know there was a lot of talk about that.

Certainly, again, I'd say I've been here a couple of months now, but I can assure you that the minister of defense himself at the MOD has taken a keen interest in accountability. And as I (joint and recede ?) even, say, five-ton trucks, we do it jointly and we do accountability for our own records, even though it's not required by the DISAM, the security assistance manual.

So we're watching our accountability and now they have really picked up their accountability. I do not believe that the corruption is to the extent that it has been, say a year ago, because it is their first choice to procure through foreign military sales -- foreign military sales through U.S. processes. And then I, again, say that our friends back in the rear, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency and USASAC, the security assistance command in Fort Belvoir, are the ones that actually let these contracts.

Certainly, we have many, many cases that are foreign -- foreign weapons or foreign procurement items, but they're all -- 99 percent of these weapons and armaments and procurements are done through U.S. processes. I know of no underhanded -- I know people talk about underhanded schemes and things of that nature, but I think the minister -- in fact, as a good example, they have not closed their FY '07 fiscal budget.

You know, in the U.S., of course, we operate on a fiscal year. They operate on a calendar year. They have not officially closed their books, because the minister of defense expects his director of finance to account for 100 percent of their expenditures, just as we do with our U.S. budget.

We were notified yesterday that they are in the process of releasing the first \$2 billion of foreign military sales, from the Iraqi government, to go into our treasure. So I think that's a major step forward. We work almost every day with them on receiving procedures, from truck to tank to sleeping bag, you know? And once he could be assured in his own mind that he had 100 percent accountability of what the Iraqis have expended on foreign military sales for the U.S. government, and only then would he release the '08 budget.

So I know there's talk about that. Again I just came from Capitol Hill. I have seen no instance of that. I have seen no under- the-table agreements, even though there are talk of them.

One program -- I mentioned we were out at Besmaya. And it's my personal opinion -- Stephen Scott -- that they are still using those old BMPs, of Ukrainian and Russian descent, which is a cultural change for me. The last time that I was here, in 2003, BMPs were captured enemy equipment.

Until they have a main battle tank and a troop carrier, what we are proposing is a BTR, which is a personnel carrier manufactured in the Ukraine. We would still procure that through U.S. procurement. They have to have a main battle tank and a troop carrier to create anything that resembles an army.

But yeah, I'm getting off of your question. I know there has been talk about corruption and things of that nature. I'm a finance guy by trade. I have seen none of that. I have personally been in with the minister, and his efforts have been 100 percent on accountability and responsibility, by his leaders, to not only account for every nickel that comes out of their budget that goes into our treasury; it has become 100 percent mission accomplished.

MR. : And one of the things that I'd like to echo, along with Colonel Scott's comments, is, you know, the reason that FMS is the program of choice for the MOD and the other ministries here is because of the transparency. And as you pointed out, you know, taxpayers back in the States are concerned about accountability and the corruption that exists in any government, not just Iraq. Remember that foreign military sales program extends to over 120 nations throughout the world.

But the one thing that you need to keep in mind is that the foreign military sales program is Iraqi dollars. It's not U.S. tax dollars in this program. It's Iraqi dollars.

So they, the Iraqi people, as well as their elected and appointed leadership, are very cognizant of the perception of impropriety, and want to go through a process, that is as stringent and transparent as possible, to do multiple things: reduce whatever corruption is inherent in the system and present the best face to a new, fledgling government, to show the people of Iraq that this government has the interest of the nation and its citizens at heart.

COL./MR. : Absolutely.

MR. HOLT: Okay, Jarred.

Anything else?

Q Well, if we're asking follow-ups, I guess I'll just throw this in, then. So are you confident that the -- just the -- as far as the day-to-day nitty-gritty, as far as electronic systems, the computers, the types of staff that's needed on the Iraqi side to keep running this thing once we've drawn down our troops, is that all in place or can be in place, that they're well-trained enough to be able to run these types of programs, that we don't see, you know, some of our armaments ending up in the hands of people we don't want them to end up in the hands of, you know, five years from now.

COL./MR. : Yeah, that's not going to happen. I'm not going to even pretend to say for a minute that they're as computer literate as we are. Hell, if I can't get my wireless connection over in the WMR tent, I'm going to have a fit. They don't think in those kind of terms.

I guess first I should say I was surprised that we even an Internet this time. However, in my travels, when I go to the Iraqi -- the director of communications and armaments, they are quickly becoming computer literate amazingly fast considering what I consider to be the standard. I mean, I remember when we had 286s. I mean, I guess that kind of dates myself. But they are quickly -- I'm working five foreign military sales communications cases --

(word inaudible) -- expansion, and these are all DSN and Internet connections, even a secure net.

So we're working the expansion of those networks for them. They do actually have computers. Those computers are Dell by manufacture for the most part, and they're coming along amazingly quickly, because, you know, even in our culture there are some folks who are computer literate and some by -- some of them still have other people read their e-mail in the light. But I believe they have -- we're assisting them in developing the IT infrastructure to accomplish this kind of accountability and checkability, if you will.

We Internet -- we e-mail back and forth. We are in constant contact. And we visit our Iraqi partners on a daily basis, their managerial levels, their decision-makers. We check receipts, we check dollars, we check accountability. And like Captain Roy said, this is -- Iraqi funds come into our Treasury buying U.S. commodities and goods for the most part. So of course, we have a vested interest in making sure that that is not only procured properly, but tracked properly.

MR./COL. : And along those same lines, for accountability of small arms -- and you'll see this in the province, that we'll send you press releases, with those units that fielding locations such as Besmaya. We have trained the Iraqis and they have procured through the foreign military sales program biometric kits, the computer equipment necessary to capture some prints, retinal scans, voice prints, as well as a picture with the soldier holding his brand-new M-16 or brand-new M-4 to ensure that that soldier is tied to that piece of materiel.

That equipment or that data that's captured is already being used in ways that the coalition hadn't thought of when we brought in the biometrics.

Our primary concern was along the lines of your question, making sure that those weapons that are procured with -- through the program, the foreign military sales program, that they don't end up in the hands of the insurgents. That's -- was our primary concern.

The Iraqis have turned around and used that biometric data to validate their pay system and their personnel records for the ministry of defense. That's how they ensure that the right soldiers are getting paid and the airmen are getting paid from the Ministry of Defense.

So they are -- again, like Colonel Scott had pointed out earlier, this is a very hands-on society. Once you -- once you give them the basic concept of how something works and you give them the opportunity to work with it, they learn very, very fast. And they are coming along very, very quickly.

COL. SCOTT: Yes. And to echo that, the biometrics I'm familiar with -- with where we started with that in the Pentagon. I've actually seen it in action with these basic training camps and the soldiers. The snapshot of the irises and the fingerprintings and these Iraqi soldiers, they know that that weapon becomes part of their person, just like a U.S. soldier. My 9-millimeter is on my person and it never leaves my side. And they also know that they're responsible and accountable for that weapon.

Apart from that, of course, when we issue and do the -- (inaudible) -- of these weapons, it's just not -- okay, we received 5,000 today. We do this at

the serial number level, and we've -- we maintain a repository of those serial numbers, as do they. So we are double-tracking on this one.

And a sensitive weapon is still a sensitive item, both in our army and in theirs. These weapons will not be lost by the Iraqis or turned over to anyone else. They are too proud of them.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Well, we're running over on time here, and we do appreciate you coming and being on with us for the blogger's roundtable today.

Colonel, if you've got any closing thoughts for us?

COL. SCOTT: Well, I'll tell you, the pleasure is mine. Again, I just -- I told you that I'd spent the last two and a half years up in Washington doing what I thought was important for the U.S. forces, but having come over here and spending a lot of time with my partners in the Iraqi army, I'm 100 percent behind what we're doing. They're on track. They're on schedule. Their hearts are in the right places. They're grooming and growing their own NCOs and officers and leaders to take charge of -- to take charge of Iraq. And I'm very, very pleased and excited about what the near-term future brings for this society.

When I was over at Besmaya the other day and I was around, I guess, maybe 20 Iraqi soldiers, and of course they were -- they saw an Apache fly over and of course they said we want Apaches. And of course, we know that that may be on down the way a little bit, but it is -- it is not what I expected. They have embraced us and we embrace them both because we have a mutual interest here, we know. And it is going way far better than I would have ever expected.

So again, thank you for the opportunity to have a -- to have a chat with you. I'm excited about what we're doing.

MR. HOLT: All right. Thank you very much, Colonel Davis Scott, the director of the Army Programs for Foreign Military Sales from the Multinational Security Transition Command-Iraq. Thank you very much, sir, for joining us, and we look forward to speaking with you again.

COL. SCOTT: Anytime.

END.